

Available online at [www.sciencedirect.com](http://www.sciencedirect.com)

Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences 2 (2010) 5726–5730

---

**Procedia**  
Social and Behavioral Sciences

---

WCES-2010

# Social perception of homosexuality in Romania

Moraru Adela<sup>a</sup>\*<sup>a</sup>“Dimitrie Cantemir” University of Targu Mures, 540477, Romania

Received November 15, 2009; revised December 3, 2009; accepted January 25, 2010

---

## Abstract

Romania has moved from communist repression of homosexuality during 80's to abrogation of the last article of Penal Code (art. 200) which incriminate public manifestation of homosexuality, in the year 2000, at the pressures of European Council. Still, societal attitudes toward homosexuality are dominated by intolerance, especially in rural areas. In a Gallup study conducted in 2003, 45% of respondents said homosexuals should not be treated the same as others in society; 37% thought homosexuality should be criminalized; and 40% thought homosexuals should not be allowed to live in Romania. Our research tries to investigate attitudes toward homosexuality in a sample of 143 Romanian participants, including socio-demographical variables as age, educational level, religious affiliation and contact with homosexuals.

© 2010 Elsevier Ltd. Open access under [CC BY-NC-ND license](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).

**Keywords:** Homosexuality, Romania; attitudes toward homosexuality.

---

## 1. Introduction

Romania has moved from communist repression of homosexuality during 80's to abrogation of the last article of Penal Code (art. 200) which incriminate public manifestation of homosexuality, in the year 2000, at the pressures of European Council. Still, societal attitudes toward homosexuality are dominated by intolerance, especially in rural areas. In a Gallup study conducted in 2003, 45% of respondents said homosexuals should not be treated the same as others in society; 37% thought homosexuality should be criminalized; and 40% thought homosexuals should not be allowed to live in Romania. The present study tries to investigate the construct “attitudes toward homosexuality”, to study the correlates of homophobic attitudes and their influence in determining a high level of intolerance and socio-moral condemnation of homosexuality in Romania.

There is no significant Romanian study concerning the number of homosexuals in Romania. Estimates of international studies reveal that almost 224000 active homosexuals men exist, approximate 2% from total population. Also, a number of 560 00 men have declared to be bisexual, representing 5% of total population. The numbers are significant as there are many public debates and manifestations pro and contra homosexuality in Romania. As long as a lot of Romanians are orthodox, religious factor has a significant impact. Studies (Hunsberger & Jackson, 2005) have revealed the following correlates of sexual prejudice: gender, age, education and religiosity.

---

\* Moraru Adela.

E-mail address: [adella4you@yahoo.com](mailto:adella4you@yahoo.com)

Men, older individuals, the less educated and the more 'religious' appear to have more negative attitudes toward homosexuality, at least among Judeo-Christians (Herek, 2000). A recent study (Sulhover, Rimac, 2009) has shown that Romania is among the most intolerant countries from Europe toward homosexuals: 65.2% of participant in the study said that they don't want to have a homosexual as a neighbor and 77% believes that homosexuality is not justified.

## 2. Theoretical approaches

First, a clear distinction has to be made between different terms that assess the negative attitude toward homosexual: homophobia, heterosexism and sexual prejudice. Society's rethinking of sexual orientation was crystallized in the term *homophobia*, which heterosexual psychologist George Weinberg coined in the late 1960s. The word first appeared in print in 1969 and was subsequently discussed at length in Weinberg's 1972 book, *Society and the Healthy Homosexual*. George Weinberg (1972) first used the word "homophobia" to describe the fearful attitudes toward homosexuality and homosexuals. He argued that people express their hatred to or assault homosexuals because they are afraid of homosexuals. In his usage of "homophobia," it seems that Weinberg mixed clinical meaning of "phobia" with the prejudiced attitudes or acts (Wickberg 2000).

Although homophobia became a popular term to describe heterosexuals' prejudiced attitudes toward homosexuals, this usage of the term "homophobia" has been criticized by researchers because it suggests that heterosexuals with such beliefs are pathological or mentally ill. Haaga (1991) further clarified the distinction between phobia and prejudice concluding that prejudice is a better word to describe heterosexuals' negative attitudes toward homosexuals. Around the same time, *heterosexism* began to be used as a term analogous to sexism and racism, describing an ideological system that denies, denigrates, and stigmatizes any nonheterosexual form of behavior, identity, relationship, or community (Herek, 1990). Scientific analysis of the psychology of antigay attitudes will be facilitated by a new term. *Sexual prejudice* serves this purpose nicely. Broadly conceived, sexual prejudice refers to all negative attitudes based on sexual orientation, whether the target is homosexual, bisexual, or heterosexual. Given the current social organization of sexuality, however, such prejudice is almost always directed at people who engage in homosexual behavior or label themselves gay, lesbian, or bisexual (Herek, 2000).

Two important theories about attitudes toward homosexuality worth to be mention here, as they are relevant to our study: role theory and contact theory. According to Bidle (1979) role theory, There are specific expectations that people need to satisfy their roles. These expectations are shared by many people and are learned through socialization. These expectations are learned from parents, siblings, and peers and can be taught through social institutions such as schools and churches (Eagly 1987). Not only are expectations shared, but so are the reactions. People who follow the expected behaviors anticipate being rewarded, while those who violate them anticipate punishments. Kite and Deaux (1987) studied the stereotypes associated with gay men and lesbians. Their results demonstrated that heterosexuals associated gay men with heterosexual female characteristics and lesbians with heterosexual male traits. For example, lesbians are masculine and have short hair, and gay men walk femininely, have high-pitched voices, and wear jewelry.

In *The Nature of Prejudice*, Gordon W. Allport (1954) proposed contact theory, in which majority group members' prejudice toward a minority group is reduced through interaction with members of the minority group. In order for contact theory to work effectively, four conditions must be satisfied. First, the contact needs to occur between groups with equal status. If one group has higher status than the other, the interaction does not contribute to the reduction of prejudice. Second, group members have to work on trying to reach the same goal, which creates solidarity across the groups. Third, cooperation, not competition, is necessary. Fourth, institutional supports can increase the effects of contact.

Heterosexuals who personally know a lesbian or gay man appear to hold more positive attitudes toward homosexuals as a group than do individuals without such contacts, and the more contacts a person has, the more favorable the attitudes (Herek, 1988; Herek & Capitano, 1996; Herek & Glunt, 1993). Although those with favorable attitudes may be more likely to become friendly with gay men and lesbians, Allport's (1954) contact hypothesis suggests that contact itself may reduce prejudice. Heterosexual women appear to have more contacts with known lesbians and gay men than do heterosexual men, another possible mediator of women's lesser homophobia. However, variability among women in relation to the number of gay men or lesbians known should still predict homophobic attitudes. (Basow, 2000)

As we can see, negative attitudes toward homosexuality are multifaceted and have multiple components. According to these findings we used an instrument proposed by LaMar and Kite (1998) to evaluate homosexuality on multiple dimensions like: contact, stereotypes, condemnation/tolerance and morality. Our research tries to investigate attitudes toward homosexuality in a sample of 143 Romanian participants, including socio-demographical variables as age, educational level, religious affiliation and contact with homosexuals.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Participants

A number of 143 participants completed the scale, medium age being 23.9, from which 93 were women (65%) and 50 men (35%). From the total number of participants, 34 subjects were high school students (grade XI and XII), 43 were students enrolled in the Faculty of Psychology and 66 were workers in different professional areas.

#### 3.2. Material

Participants completed Components of Attitudes Toward Homosexuality scale, by LaMar and Kite (1998) which use a Likert assessment and evaluate stereotypes, prejudice and anxiety toward homosexuals. The scale has internal consistency of .92 (alpha coefficient) and test-retest reliability of .71. Participants answer using a 5 point Likert scale ranging from 1 Strongly Disagree to 5 Strongly Agree. Higher scores reveal a high intolerance for homosexuals or “homophobia”, lower scores reveal tolerance, accepting homosexuals. Condemnation/Tolerance scale includes 11 items, which evaluate the intolerant attitude toward homosexual persons, in public, professional personal area. Morality scale includes 13 items concerning social norms that facilitate or not homosexuality. There are items that refer to legislation, family institution or to “treating” this persona from the society. Contact scale includes 18 items and assess the attitude toward contact with homosexuals, anxiety when being nearby and the level of implication in a relation with a homosexual persona. Stereotype scale includes 7 items, that assess the stereotypical perception of homosexuals regarding relational, intimate, sexual aspects and physical characteristics.

Also participants were administered a sociodemographical questionnaire that assess age, gender, religion, education, experiences with gay and lesbians.

#### 3.3. Procedure

The experimenter greeted participants upon arrival and obtained informed consent. Participants were then asked to complete the scales and socio-demographic questionnaire individually. The materials were counterbalanced to avoid possible order effects. No time limit was imposed.

### 4. Results

The descriptive indices (mean and standard deviation) of the results are presented in the table nr. 1:

Table 1. Descriptive indices for Components of Attitude toward Homosexuality scales

Scale	Mean	Standard deviation
Condemnation	7.93	4.94
Contact	15.4	7.28
Morality	10.6	4.94
Stereotypes	7.9	3.00
Total	49.3	18.7

Five socio-demographical factors were explored in correlational study (table nr. 2) and ANOVA analysis (table nr.3) to evaluate their impact on attitude toward homosexuality : age, sex, education, religion and contact with homosexuals.

Table 2. Correlation coefficients between socio-demographical factors and homosexuality scale.

<b>Factors</b>	<b>Correlation coefficient (Bravais Pearson)</b>	<b>Significance level</b>
Age-homophobia	-.15	Non-significant
Education homophobia	-.22	0.01
Religion homophobia	-.22	0.01
Gender homophobia	.07	Non-significant
Contacts homophobia	-.29	0.01

As can be noticed from the table nr. 2, only three factors correlated significantly with homophobia: education, religion and contact, all three being negatively correlated. That means, in simple terms, the more religious a person is, the more uneducated and with no previous contact with homosexual, the more intolerant he will be.

Results of ANOVA comparisons are presented below:

Table 3. Result of ANOVA multiple comparisons (F) and significance level.

<b>Factors</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>Significance level</b>
age	18.2	.000
gender	.733	.393
religion	3.984	.021
education	7.914	.001
contact	6.357	.000

From table nr.3. we see an important contribution of age, religion, education and contact to negative attitudes toward homosexuals. No significant effect have been found for gender, although previous research have shown that men are particularly more homophobic than women, especially toward gay. We also performed Scheffe posthoc analysis to explore in deep these effects. Our findings are summarized below:

- More intolerant people are those of lower ages (14-20) and older (over 31) comparing with people between 20-30 years old
- Subjects with no previous contact with homosexuals were more intolerant than those who have , even rarely these experiences
- Graduate students are more tolerant than undergraduate people toward homosexuality
- Orthodox group was the most intolerant comparing to catholic or any other religious group

## 5. Conclusions

People more likely to assess homosexuals in a negative way appear to be, young people (students, in our case) more than the adults (20-30 years in our group) but not more than the elderly (age group 31-66 years), people belonging to the Orthodox religion than other religions, but not significantly more than Catholics; of them, people who attend church more are significantly more intolerant than those who do not. Also, people in rural areas are more intolerant - probably due to traditional moral values assimilated- those with secondary education rather than higher education. People with frequent contact with homosexuals are more tolerant than those who haven't been in contact with them.

Attitude toward homosexuality is a function of age, educational level, religious affiliation, and contact with homosexual persons. In other words, people with high scores on Scale of Attitudes on Homosexuality Components (Components of Homosexuality Attitude Scale) are people who have little information on homosexuality, reduced contacts with the restricted category, which attends church, with lower educational level and older.

A few limitation of this study has to be mentioned. First, we used a correlational approach so we cannot draw causal conclusions like socio-demographical characteristics determine negative attitudes toward homosexuality. Other factors may be involved as an explanation for these correlations. For example, studies have shown that personality characteristics like openness to experience moderate these attitudes toward homosexuals (Shackelford, Besser, 2007) Second, we obtained data through self-report, so social desirability effect may be present. Future studies can use implicit measure of attitudes in order to be more accurate evaluations of homophobia. Third, we used only a small sample of Romanian inhabitants; future studies can involve large samples to be more relevant.

## References

- Allport, Gordon W. (1954). *The Nature of Prejudice*. New York, NY: AddisonWesley Publishing Company.
- Basow, S.A. (2000) - Predictors of Homophobia in Female College Students. *Sex Roles: A Journal of Research*, March
- Biddle, Bruce J. (1979). *Role Theory: Expectations, Identities, and Behaviors*. New York, NY: Academic Press, Inc.
- Cochran, J.K., & Beeghly, L. (1991). The influence of religion on attitudes toward nonmarital sexuality. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 30, 45-62.
- Eagly, A. H. (1987). *Sex Differences in Social Behavior: A Social Role Interpretation*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers
- Haaga, David A. F. (1991). “Homophobia?” *Journal of Social Behavior and Personality* 6(1):171174.
- Herek, G.M. (2000). The psychology of sexual prejudice. *Current directions in psychological science*, 9, 19-22.
- Herek, G. 1988. “Heterosexuals’ Attitudes toward Lesbians and Gay Men: Correlates and Gender Differences.” *Journal of Sex Research* 25(4):451477.
- Herek, G, Capitanio, J (1996). “Some of my best friends’: Intergroup contact, concealable stigma, and heterosexuals’ attitudes toward gay men and lesbians.” *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 22(4):412424.
- Herek, Gregory M. and Eric K. Glunt. (1993). “Interpersonal Contact and Heterosexuals’ Attitudes toward Gay Men: Results from a National Survey.” *The Journal of Sex Research* 30(3):239244.
- Hunsberger, B., & Jackson, L.M. (2005). Religion, meaning and prejudice. *Journal of Social Issues*, 61, 807-826.
- Hudson, W. W., & Ricketts, W. A. (1980). A strategy for the measurement of homophobia. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 5, 356–371.
- ^ Intolerance, Discrimination and Authoritarianism in Public Opinion, Gallup report for the Institute for Public Policies, 2003
- Kite, Mary E. and Kay Deaux. (1986). “Attitudes toward Homosexuality: Assessment and Behavioral Consequences.” *Basic and Applied Social Psychology* 7(2):137162.
- LaMar and Kite (1998). Sex differences in attitudes toward gay men and lesbians: A multi-dimensional perspective. *The Journal of Sex Research*, 35, 189-196.
- Shackelford, T., Besser, A. (2007) Predicting Attitudes toward Homosexuality: Insights from Personality Psychology *Individual Differences Research* Vol. 5, No. 2, pp. 106-114
- Stulhofer, A., Rimac, I (2009) - Determinants of Homonegativity in Europe, *Journal of Sex Research*, 46(1), 24–32
- Weinberg, George. 1972. *Society and the Healthy Homosexual*. New York, NY: St. Martin’s Press.